

PATENT

Appl. No. 09/998,557
Amdt. dated February 18, 2004
Amendment under 37 CFR 1.116 Expedited Procedure
Examining Group 2645

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1. (Previously Presented): A method for using a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, comprising
a voice-messaging system receiving a toll-free call placed by a user;
verifying that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
receiving from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
receiving from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
placing a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user; and
charging the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.
2. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, further comprising the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party telephone line if the third-party telephone line is available.
3. (Canceled):
4. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the step of verifying that the user is a valid user comprises receiving and verifying a user-identification code and a password code.
5. (Canceled):

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6. (Previously Presented): The method as recited in claim 4, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.
7. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system allows the user to choose between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.
8. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party-call connection is not established.
9. (Original): The method as recited in claim 1, wherein the voice-messaging system directs the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.
10. (Original): The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party number comprises establishing a 3-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.
11. (Original): The method as recited in claim 2, wherein the step of connecting the telephone call to the third-party number comprises:
establishing a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and
disconnecting the voice-messaging system from the call.
12. (Original): The method as recited in claim 10, further comprising:
during or after the call between the user and the third party, receiving a pre-defined signal from the user; and
transferring the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

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13. (Previously Presented): An article of manufacture, comprising:
a computer-usable medium having a computer-readable program-code means embodied therein for causing a voice-messaging system to place long-distance telephone calls, the computer-readable program-code means in said article of manufacture comprising:
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a toll-free call placed by a user;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user of the voice-messaging system;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a request to place a long-distance telephone call;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive from the user a telephone number of a third-party telephone line to be called;
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to place a telephone call to the third-party telephone line associated with the third-party telephone number entered by the user; and
computer-readable program means for causing a computer to charge the user a pre-determined long-distance rate in relation to the telephone call.

14. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call if the third-party telephone line is available.

15. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to verify that the user is a valid user comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive and verify a user-identification code and a password code.

16. (Canceled):

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17. (Previously Presented): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 15, wherein the user-identification code is associated with a billing account, and wherein charges for the long-distance call are charged to the billing account.

18. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to provide the user a choice between accessing voice messages or placing a telephone call.

19. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu if a third-party call connection is not established.

20. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 13, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to direct the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu when the user enters a pre-defined signal at any step during the process of placing a call to a third party.

21. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 14, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone call comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a three-way call between the user, the voice-messaging system and the third-party telephone line.

22. (Original): The article of manufacture of claim 14, wherein the computer-readable program means for causing a computer to be connected to the third-party telephone line via the telephone line comprises computer-readable program means for causing a computer to establish a direct connection between the user and the third-party telephone line; and computer-readable program means for causing a computer to disconnect the voice messaging system from the call.

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23. (Original): The article of manufacture as recited in claim 21, further comprising computer-readable program means for causing a computer to receive a pre-defined signal from the user during or after the call between the user and the third party; and computer-readable program means for causing a computer to transfer the user back to a voice-messaging-system menu.

24. (Previously Presented): A method of using a voice messaging system to place a telephone call, comprising:
establishing a user account for a user, wherein the user account has associated with it pre-determined rates for placing telephone calls using the voice messaging system;
issuing the user an user-identification code and a password code associated with the user account;
providing the user a toll-free number by which to access the voice messaging system;
receiving a call from the user via the toll-free number;
verifying that the user is a valid user by receiving and verifying the user-identification code and password code associated with the user account;
receiving a request from the user to place a telephone call;
receiving from the user the telephone number to call;
placing the call to the telephone number; and
charging the user the pre-determined rates if the call is connected.